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Any firefighter knows that the days of solely battling blazes is a thing of the past.

The modern fire department is charged with much more, not the least of which is waging the front-line fight against terrorism.

Three CHDS graduates in the fire safety field have progressed up the career ladder this year. Patrick Butler was promoted to Assistant Chief; longtime Miami firefighter Joseph Fernandez accepted the Fire Chief position in Dania Beach, Fla.; and, Jay Hagen was promoted to Battalion Chief with the Seattle Fire Department earlier this year.

All three say their education at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security has prepared them to think critically about the emerging threats their agencies face.

Patrick Butler embraces the changing nature of the fire service profession.

Butler was promoted to his new post as Assistant Chief just a couple of weeks before his CHDS graduation.

He said his CHDS education will be valuable in the changing role of today's modern fire service.

"I have really learned to open up my mind and break out of the 'stove pipe' that many times impedes the traditional fire service," Butler said.

Moreover, he said the program has cultivated critical thinking skills important to the array of issues fire professionals must now consider, from fighting fires to fighting terrorism.

"The traditional role of the fire department is changing whether we like it or not," Butler added. "We need to get off 'the island' and look outside our world from a fresh perspective. We have gone from a fire and emergency service to an all-hazard service provider."

As Assistant Chief, Butler oversees a 107-square-mile district in south and southwest Los Angeles that is home to 1.5 million residents, as well as the Los Angeles International Airport and the Port of Los Angeles, with 350 firefighters stationed in 33 neighborhood stations.

The airport and port are both potential terrorist targets, he notes, and the LAFD has worked with other partners in prevention and response planning focused on those two locations.

Butler brings 20 years of experience with the LAFD to his new role. That experience includes working as commander of the Arson Terrorism Unit, commander and captain of a 105-foot fireboat, commander of Air Operations and section commander in the LAFD Homeland Security Division. In addition to his time with the LAFD, he has 14 years' experience as a reserve Deputy Sheriff with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.

He has co-authored two books: "Incident Command System Model Procedures Guide for Incidents Involving Structural Fire Fighting, High Rise, Multi Casualty, Highway, & Managing LargeScale Incidents Using NIMSICS," Fire Protection Publications, Oklahoma State University 2008, and "Special Operations Incidents Involving Hazardous Materials/WMD, Structural Collapse, Wildland, and Managing LargeScale Incidents Using NIMSICS," Fire Protection Publications, Oklahoma State University 2008.

His CHDS education has had an especially profound impact on his career, he said.

"It has developed my critical thinking skills and challenged me to use my imagination in my day to day operations," he said. "I find myself creating 'what if scenarios' and looking at the bigger picture. For most of my career I focused on tactics in an operational environment, but CHDS has shifted my perspective to strategy and strategic thinking, which are extremely vital when leading an organization"

Moreover, his time at the Center has linked him with a national network of alumni that he can tap for expertise on varied issues when needed.

"When I come across a challenge that I can't resolve or need a different perspective, I reach out to the vast network of CHDS graduates and literally within minutes I get a response and a recommendation," he noted.

For Joseph Fernandez, an all-hazards approach to homeland security will be an everyday concern. Fernandez is leaving the Miami Department of Fire Rescue and moving up Interstate 95 a few miles to take over as chief of the Dania Beach (Fla.) Fire Department.

The 2008 CHDS graduate will be serving a city that has a vulnerability to a variety of homeland security concerns – from critical infrastructure such as interstates, a port and an airport to the volatile weather hazards for which South Florida is known.

"Dania Beach is a coastal City located within one of Florida's most densely populated metropolitan areas sharing jurisdictional boundaries with Ft. Lauderdale and Hollywood Florida" Fernandez noted.

The city is situated just off the Interstate 95 corridor and one of the Sunshine State's main costal roadways, U.S. Highway 1, runs through town. The Fire Department is a partner in a regional response team that provides mutual aid services to the Fort Lauderdale International Airport and Port Everglades.

As the Fire Chief of the City of Dania Beach, he will be responsible for all aspects of fire and Emergency Medical Services services as well as serving as the city's Emergency Management Director.

Like many municipalities, the national economic downturn has impacted decision making in Dania Beach, which poses an issue for emergency service agencies.

"As with most other agencies, shrinking ad-valorem tax revenues and increase calls for service present a challenge to maintaining the necessary levels of service delivery," Fernandez noted.

Moreover, the department faces an array of tasks beyond traditional fire safety. The Fire Department is a partner in a regional response team that serves the Fort Lauderdale International Airport and Port Everglades. And, the city must be prepared for the tropical storms and hurricanes that are common to that area.

Collaboration is critical in meeting those mandates and Fernandez said his CHDS experience has helped him prepare to meet those demands.

"CHDS has focused my awareness of key concepts such as leadership, multijurisdictional and multidisciplinary collaboration," Fernandez noted. "The Center enhanced my understanding of the imperative need for introducing education and knowledge management at all levels of organizational relations.

Fernandez acknowledges that the role of fire professionals is evolving in an era that emphasizes system-based approaches to homeland security.

"By focusing on disseminating the underlying needs of homeland security providers, Fire Chief's and other homeland security practitioners can catalyze and accelerate the change required to implement an effective national systems based approach to homeland security," he noted. "I plan to focus on leveraging my relationships across disciplines and jurisdictions to identify and support opportunities for value innovation that will result in enhanced, cost efficient levels of emergency service delivery."

Before accepting his new position, Fernandez had risen through the ranks of the Miami Fire Department during a 25-year career, including 12 years as Assistant Fire Chief and Emergency Manager. He was also the Administrator of the Miami Urban Security Initiative from 2003 through 2008.

During a 21-year career with the Seattle Fire Department Jay Hagen has seen the nature of the firefighting profession evolve into the all-hazards challenge it is today.

"We're definitely engaged in all hazards. It is terrorism response, it's intelligence, it's critical infrastructure protection," said Hagen. "We've been able to invest in those roles through our participation in CHDS."

Hagen, a 2006 of CHDS, was promoted to Battalion Chief earlier this year.

He credits an education from the Center with how he approaches the job in which he oversees about 50 firefighters from nine stations in the northern portion of Seattle.

The city's Fire Department counts two current master's degree students, five graduates and three Executive Leaders Program graduates among its ranks.

"We really discovered the value of the CHDS program in developing leaders and engaging people in strategic thinking," Hagen said.

In addition, the participation links the department with a network of fellow professionals around the county to communicate with regarding emerging challenges, Hagen said.

"I rely on the networking very heavily, I rely on being a more skilled researcher and I rely on what I learned about research now to approach a problem," Hagen said.

Prior to his promotion, Hagen was the department's Emergency Preparedness Officer. He has held numerous positions with the Seattle Fire Department ranging from Haz-Mat supervision to recruitment, among other duties.

His CHDS experience will be beneficial in his new role in collaborating with other emergency management professions.

"I interact with other disciplines – law enforcement, emergency management public health," he said. "It's very tactical compared with what I was doing."

Hagen's goals for the new profession are pretty straightforward. He wants to achieve expertise in being a Battalion Chief.

"My goals also involved keeping my people safe, provide them with the best tools and training and working on my leadership style," he said.

Hagen hopes to work in the current position for three to five years and further perfect his leadership style. He is excited about getting back into the operational side of fire safety, he added.

"I missed being in operations, working with firefighters and the unique problems that emergency incidents area – whether they are a structure fire or tactical rescue," he said.

As a CHDS student, Hagen served as president of his cohort. After graduation, he was a CHDS Fellow at FEMA in Washington, D.C.

Aside from his job duties with the Seattle Fire Department, he has served on numerous advisory bodies and currently serves on the Interagency Board for the Standardization of Equipment. He adds that a CHDS education is beneficial in all those roles.

"I learned how to craft a persuasive argument and I've been able to get involved in a lot of important projects," he said.

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